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Wanda Kaczynski
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Dec. 17, 1990

Dear Ma—

Thank you very much for the check that you enclosed in your Christmas card.

To save your embarrassment, I've written to the Schoers accepting their offer of a framed photograph. However, I've told them that if it exceeds such-and-such dimensions, to please give it to you to send me at an appropriate time, because if it won't fit in my mailbox, I'm not particularly anxious to make a trip to the post office in winter weather just to pick up the photograph. Of course, if they do give you the photograph, you needn't send it to me. Judging from the one occasion on which I met him, I think Norm Schoer is a twerp, and I won't pine away from disappointment if I don't get to hang his picture on my wall.

Yes, I would be very interested to have a copy of your Dombek family history. And, by the way, I am interested in the question of the accuracy of long-term recollections of this sort; so I have a suggestion: If you haven't already sent copies of your recollections to Benny and Freda, ask them to write down their own recollections of the same period. Then, after you've all written your recollections independently, you can compare them, and the extent to which the three versions agree or disagree will give an indication of their accuracy. If you've already sent copies to Benny and Freda, then it's too late for independent versions, but you could still ask

and

indicate anything that they remember differently. I would be very interested to see Bennys and Fredas recollections or comments as well as yours.

Thank you for your offer of financial help in case I decide to see a doctor. I'll probably take advantage of that offer some time within the next few months. I wouldn't be surprised if a full examination by a cardiologist, with electrocardiograms and so forth, would run to a couple of hundred dollars or so, but I take it that you're sufficiently well set financially that a couple of hundred dollars will cause you no inconvenience.

In answer to your questions, there's not much snow on the ground here yet, but we'll probably be getting more soon. Eventually I'll be able to use Dad's coat and gloves, but for this winter I'm adequately clothed, so please don't send them yet.

a day after I wrote this letter — very heavy snowfall!

No, I don't remember the volumes on Greek Civilization that Benny and Sylvia gave me. It must have been a long time ago. But I have read a good deal about the Greeks in the last few years: Thucydides' History of the Peloponesian War, Oxford History of the Classical World, a biography of Pericles, and Greek Realities by Finley Hooper.

As to the Skeptical Enquirer, I have 3 back issues of it, and if you'd like to read them I can send them to you — provided that you send them back to me when you're done with

minimize the risk of their being lost in the mail. They contain some articles that I'd like to save, and I don't know whether these back-issues are still available — they may be irreplaceable.

If you wanted to subscribe to the Skeptical Enquirer you could write

Anyhow, please let me know whether you want me to send them.

CSICOP
P.O. Box 229
Central Park Station
Buffalo, NY 14215.

(CSICOP stands for Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal.)

I don't remember whether the 3 issues of the Skeptical Enquirer that I've read said anything about walking on hot coals or suspended animation. They did have something about the Transcendental Meditation Movement, and they found no substantiation for that movement's claims of levitation. Many years ago I think I read an article by some guy who, with some primitive people, went through a ceremony of walking on hot rocks. He said it wasn't so fearsome as it looked, because while the lower parts of the rocks were glowing red, the upper parts, which one's feet actually touched, were not hot enough to cause any serious burns. As to suspended animation, I think there's no doubt that that exists — it's just a physiological state in which the body's processes are so slowed down that the person may be taken for dead, yet they are not so slowed that he actually dies.

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able to voluntarily put themselves into suspended animation. I don't know whether they can or not. Possibly they may be able to, since it does seem to be established that some persons, through training and practice, are able to control physical processes (blood pressure, etc.) that are not normally under voluntary control.

Anyhow, one thing I've learned from reading the Skeptical Enquirer and a couple of books by members of CSICOP is that you must be very, very cautious about accepting any claims of "paranormal" phenomena, no matter how plausible such claims may seem and even when they are reported by seemingly reliable persons, such as distinguished scientists. Of course, one cannot rule out "paranormal" phenomena a priori — new phenomena are discovered from time to time and one never knows for certain what may be discovered next. But personally I wouldn't accept any "paranormal"-sounding phenomena until they were accepted by the scientific community as a whole, because time and time again "paranormal" phenomena have been very plausibly reported by seemingly very reliable people, and on careful investigation have turned out to be true hokum. For example, in the Lombard Library you will find a book by a Professor Taylor, a distinguished British mathematician and scientist who reported some remarkable psychic phenomena. That book, along with another one, had me half convinced of the reality of psychic phenomena, and was one reason why I ordered those back issues of Sk. Enquirer when I learned bout CSICOP. Well, when Professor Taylor and his "psychic phenomena" were investigated, it turned

children who supposedly were able to bend spoons through mental power were actually just bending them with their hands when Prof. Taylor wasn't looking. Evidently Taylor had some psychological needs of his own that led him to want to believe in occult phenomena, and as a result he made a fool of himself. So next time around I will not take seriously any such claims without rock-solid proof and acceptance by the whole scientific community.

It's also worth noting how convincing trickery can be in these matters. In one study, some professional magicians performing tricks before a roomful of people, and the tricks were so convincing that even after being told that the things they saw were only tricks of prestidigitation, many of the people insisted that they must be occult phenomena of some sort.

At least 2 members of CSICOP have published very interesting books on these matters. One is Phillip Klass, who has published a couple of books on UFO's, and the other is James Randi, who has published a couple of books, at least one of them on the talented Charlatan Yuri (or Uri; I forget the spelling) Geller.

Well, I guess that's about all there is to say for the present. Happy New Year.

—Ted